for disposal, and if so, what are the details thereof;

(b) whether it is a fact that students, businessmen and newly married brides going abroad for studies urgent trips and to join with their husbands respectively find it difficult to get their passports;

(c) if so, what are the steps taken to help such categories of applicants;

(d) whether the power of the Regional Passport Officers to issue passports out of turn was taken away recently and those cases were being sent to the Chief Passport Officer at Delhi; and

(e) whether Government would ask the Regional Passport Officers to dispose the applications of students, business people and the spouses married to foreign citizens on a priority basis?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) There are around 12 lakh applications currently pending in 22 Passoport Offices in India.

(b) and (c) No, Sir, The Heads of Passport Office have full discretion to issue passports on out of turn and priority basis provided they are satisfied that the documentation submitted by the applicant justify their request for priority issue of passport.

(d) and (e) Yes, Sir. The discretion to issue passports on out of turn basis which has been taken away from the Heads of Passport Offices has been restored to them subject to their satisfying themselves on the basis of documentation submitted by the applicant that the request for issue of passport on out of turn basis is fully justified.

Fishing rights under Indo—Sri Lanka agreement around Kachchativu

175. SHRI ARANGIL SREEDHARAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that Indian fishermen in Ramanathapuram District, Tamil Nadu, want to have fishing rights assured in and around Kachchativu under the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement of 1974;

(b) whether Government are aware of the fact that these fishermen depend upon these fishing rights for their livelihood; and

(c) whether there is any proposal to negotiate with Sri Lankan Government to get back the traditional fishing right of our fishermen guaranteed under the 1974 Agreement?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA): (a) to (c) The Government are aware of the requirement of Indian fishermen to enjoy their traditional rights in and around the Kachchativu Island, under the Maritime Boundary Agreements between India & Sri Lanka. The Government is examining the modalities by which the extant traditional rights of Indian fishermen in the area can be exercised, without infringing upon the legalities of Indo-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Agreements.

Discussion on Tin Bigha Issue with Bangladesh P.M.

176. SHRI VIREN J. SHAH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government had discussed the quastion of renegotiating the agreement on the Tin Bigha issue with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh during her visit to India in May, 1992;

(b) whether Government brought to the notice of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the various problems arising out of the transfer of Tin Bigha to Bangladesh;

(c) if so, what are the details of the discussions and the results thereof;

(d) what was the reaction of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in this regard; and

(e) the number of Bangladeshis who came to India during each of the last three years and what is their present number as on 1st April, 1992?